

THE FOREIGN POLICY OF GREECE

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Prime Minister Kostas Karamanlis (U.N.)

THE BACKGROUND CONDITIONS

Cultural setting

Greece, in 3000 year long history has succeeded in preserving its strong national identity, what is usually referred to as “Hellenism”. This being said, many facets of this identity have been diffused worldwide and became part of other civilisations. Hellenism runs over and above the religious divide and what came to be known as the

clash of civilisations. Greeks are famous for their openness and hospitality (*philoxenia*). It is therefore not surprising that Christians, Muslims and Jews living around the Mediterranean, the Black Sea and elsewhere are attracted to Greece, the meeting point of civilisations.

Geopolitical setting

Greece’s unique position at the crossroads of civilisations is coupled to its exceptional strategic location. It is the hub of transport and

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communications from Europe to the Middle East and is essential to the logistic support of neighbouring countries. The strategic importance of Greece has been a crucial factor in the shaping of the foreign policies of external powers. Greece, however, has been cautious in exploiting its strategic position, aligning itself with the western democracies in the two World Wars and contributing with its large merchant marine to the victories.

GENERAL FOREIGN POLICY OBJECTIVES

Promoting peace and security

Greece has been a staunch supporter of the United Nations and the specialised agencies since their inception and has been actively involved in their activities. Greece always deplored the blocking of Security Council resolutions by permanent members and the politicisation of some specialised agencies, which impaired their effectiveness.

Regional defence pacts such as NATO are, in Greece's view, an essential element of collective security. From 1952, when Greece became a member of NATO, until 1974, the main threats to Greece's security were deemed to originate from the Warsaw Pact. The invasion and occupation of Northern Cyprus and the claims in the Aegean by another NATO member, Turkey, have since affected Greek defence planning and expenditure. Nevertheless, Greece kept fulfilling its obligations as a NATO member and, following the historical changes of 1989 and the emergence of NATO's new role, Greece has provided facilities for NATO's operations in the Balkans, as well

as substantial military contingents for peace-keeping purposes.

Promoting European Political Union

Greek public opinion has consistently been pro-European. In the Eurobarometer polls, the deepening and widening of the European Union receive overwhelming support. Moreover, the leaders of the two major political parties, New Democracy and PASOK, frequently refer to the federal future of the European Union. Until, however, such a state is reached, Greece is strongly attached to the principle of equal footing in EU institutions and supports a strong role for the so-called supranational institutions, namely the European Commission and the European Parliament.

In addition, Greece is likely to support any measure enhancing the diplomatic capability of the Union, as long as this does not lead to the formation of a closed *directoire* of the larger member states. Europe should speak with one voice not only on trade and economic affairs but on security as well. Following the Treaty amendments at Maastricht and Amsterdam extending the scope of the European Union to the so-called Petersberg military tasks, Greece has actively contributed to efforts aimed at building a European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) and to establish a 60,000 men European Rapid Reaction Force by 1 July 2003. Greece pledged to contribute a 3,500 men contingent, to be composed of professional military.

Preserving the US-Greek strategic partnership

US-Greek relations have been based on the common commit-

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ment of the two countries to freedom and democracy. US assistance was of critical importance for the economic recovery of Greece in the 1950s. Nevertheless, Greek public opinion has held the United States responsible for interference in Greek politics during the same period and for supporting the military dictatorship that ruled Greece from 1967 to 1974. More recently, however, it has been the United States rather than Greece that have complained about the conduct of its partner. The United States have been critical of Greek disarmament initiatives during the last period of the Cold War and of Greek attitudes towards liberation movements, deemed by the United States to be terrorist movements. Nevertheless, Greek governments have invariably supported US involvement in the security of Southeastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean, because of the permanent threat of instability in the region. In Greece's view, the United States are capable of containing crises by projecting military power in the area, although intervention should always be compatible with the provisions of the U.N. Charter. Moreover, cooperation with other major powers, such as Russia and China, is essential for the smooth functioning of the United Nations.

PROMOTING STABILITY, DEMOCRACY AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY IN SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

Stability and security

Greece has a long record of promoting the cause of stability in the Balkans. In the 1930s Greece negotiated a Balkan Pact with its

neighbours and a conciliation and arbitration agreement with Turkey. In the post World War II Balkans the Iron Curtain was an impediment to cooperation, with the exception, however, of relations with non-aligned Yugoslavia. In the 1980s, Greece provided unambiguous support to international initiatives on arms reductions and confidence building measures.

Since the end of the cold war and the democratic transition in Bulgaria and Romania, Greece has actively supported the inclusion of these countries into the Euro-atlantic structures. Greece believes that the gradual extension of the European Union and NATO to the Balkans is the most effective way to ensure stability and prosperity in the region. Greece has played an active role in shaping EU policies and related initiatives for political and economic reforms and institution-building in the Balkans, such as the South East Europe Cooperation Initiative (SECI), the Royaumont Initiative and, since the end of the Kosovo war, the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe and the EU initiatives for the Western Balkans which were given a boost at the European Council meeting of Thessaloniki in June 2003.

Good-neighbourly relations and participation in regional cooperation ventures are now political conditionalities for joining the EU. In contrast to bilateral cooperation, multilateral cooperation among Balkan countries is minimal, when compared to cooperation among Nordic, Baltic or Central European countries. Intra-balkan cooperation was given a boost following Greece's initiative to host in 1997



*Signing the Treaty of Accession, April 16, 2003
(C. Simitis, Prime Minister - G. Papandreou, Minister of Foreign Affairs)*

the first meeting of the South East Europe Cooperation Process at the level of Heads of Government in Heraklion, Crete. The second meeting took place in 1998 in Antalya, Turkey, setting the stage for annual high-level meetings, aimed at building trust among the leaders of the Balkan nations. These meetings led to the adoption of the Charter on good-neighbourly relations and cooperation and, more recently, to the conclusion of the agreement establishing the South-east Europe Energy Community.

Economic recovery

The Balkan and Black Sea countries have traditionally belonged to the economic periphery of Europe. For those countries that were behind the Iron Curtain, transition from the command economy to the market economy entailed substantial hardship to local societies. Greece has provided significant resources, including a military con-

tingent, to the “Alba” operation, aimed at restoring Albania’s infrastructure after the economic collapse of this country in the early 1990’s. Greece is still contributing to the reconstruction efforts and considers the Greek minority living in Southern Albania as a bridge between the two countries.

Economic deprivation has led to a large influx of immigrants from the former communist countries. On the other hand, political refugees from Turkey, Iraq and other countries also arrived in large numbers. Greek NGOs have provided critical support to asylum seekers and refugees. Although the number of persons enjoying the status of refugee, approximately 7,000, may appear relatively small, it is substantial compared to the number of refugees living in states with larger populations. Moreover, asylum seekers, of which there are approximately

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*Greek Presidency at the Security Council (U.N.)
Minister of Foreign Affairs Dora Bakoyanni*

50,000 in Greece, are entitled to work, once their application for asylum is properly registered; more recently, they have obtained full health coverage.

The Greek government has also taken steps aimed at the legalisation of economic immigrants. Almost a million illegal immigrants (more than half Albanians) living in Greece have availed themselves of the opportunity to be legalised since 1996. Once legalised they are subject to Greek labour and social security law; in addition, they are eligible for Greek citizenship after eight years of residence in Greece. Moreover, even illegal immigrants may benefit from the National Health System - and their children may enroll in the State Education System.

Greece has actively promoted assistance to the Balkan and Black Sea

countries. Greek technical assistance to these countries has been provided under the “Phare”, “Tempus” and “Takis” programmes. Greece availed itself of the Interreg programme in order to finance projects of interest to neighbouring Balkan countries. Both Greek public and private sector enterprises have invested heavily in the area. Greece is now the largest foreign investor in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and among the main investors in Albania, Bulgaria and Romania. Greek enterprises have been assisted by Greek banks, most of which are present in the Balkan capitals and provide significant amounts of venture capital. Greek contractors already participate in large infrastructure projects in the Balkan and Black Sea areas. Finally, Thessaloniki hosts among other international institutions, the Black Sea Development Bank and the Agency for Balkan Reconstruction.

Greece and the Yugoslav tinderbox

The end of communist rule has revived ethnic feelings in the Balkans and has led to the break-up of Yugoslavia. This process took place in a disorderly manner. Minorities did not receive international guarantees, and national sensitivities of neighbouring countries were not taken care of. Greece objected to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) carrying the name Macedonia. At best, it could lead to a confusion with the Northern Greek Province of Macedonia or, worse, it could imply expansionist designs by the newly-born State. In October 1995 the two countries signed an interim agreement providing, among other things, for U.N. mediation on the name issue. Greece has supported the conclusion of the Stabilisation and Association agreement between the EU and FYROM which provides a prospect of accession to the latter. Greece and FYROM have developed very substantial economic ties, but a compromise on the name issue, acceptable to both of them, will weigh heavily on Greece's position regarding the accession of FYROM to NATO and the EU.

Greece, through the Hellenic aid agency, has provided substantial development aid to the countries of Southeast Europe. On the other hand, Greece understands Albanian and Serb sensitivities in the Kosovo conflict and has deployed approximately 1,500 military personnel for the peace-keeping operation. Greece considers that the proposals submitted by the U.N. mediator in early 2007 provide a good basis for a compromise, allowing for the self-government of

the region, as well as for its participation in international economic organisations, while also ensuring the flourishing of all ethnic groups in an inclusive society. On the other hand, an agreement is unlikely to be reached unless Serbia, a key country in Southeastern Europe, is given a prospect of early accession to the EU.

Greece's knowledge and understanding of the intricacies of Southeastern Europe, as well as its willingness to contribute to the political and economic development of its neighbourhood - and to assume the related risks - makes it a key player in the area, and the country through which most public aid and private investment is channeled and / or coordinated.

GREECE AND TURKEY: From a strained to a normal relationship The Aegean disputes

Although both Greece and Turkey joined NATO in 1952, they have had different perceptions of their security interests. In Greece, although there have been varied assessments of the security threat posed by Turkey, the general perception has been that since 1974 this country wanted to change the Aegean *status quo* in a manner which would annex Greece's Eastern Aegean islands into Turkish zones of functional responsibility (continental shelf, Flight Information Region, sea and rescue responsibilities, NATO command responsibilities etc.). These goals, coupled with Turkish demands for the demilitarisation of the islands facing Turkey - which have been militarised after the Turkish invasion of

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Cyprus - were deemed by Greece as evidence of a policy aimed at undermining Greek sovereignty over the aforementioned islands.

Moreover, the non-recognition by Turkey of the 10 mile limit of Greek air-space and the Turkish position that the expansion of the Greek territorial sea to 12 miles (in accordance with the U.N. Law of the Sea Convention) would constitute a *casus belli*, were perceived by Greece as evidence of Turkish aggressiveness. It may also be recalled that in 1976 and 1987 Greek-Turkish disputes over the continental shelf and, in January 1996 unfolded claims over an uninhabited islet of the Imia group, came close to triggering a war between the two countries. Furthermore, air warfare over the Aegean (frequent dog-fights with sophisticated aircraft) carried serious risks of escalation.

Relations with Turkey have drastically improved since the Summer of 1999. A few weeks after the launching of negotiations aimed at promoting good neighbourliness and functional cooperation, Turkey and Greece were hit by catastrophic earthquakes. The unprecedented solidarity demonstrated by the peoples of the two countries paved the way to a fundamental reassessment of the relationship in the two capitals. Important bilateral agreements were signed (in February 2000) and committees were established to promote cooperation in various fields. Moreover, confidence-building measures have been finally implemented and new measures were discussed in the NATO framework. Moreover, the Greek position on EU-Turkish relations changed dramatically, as explained below.

The Cyprus conflict

A main cause of friction between Greece and Turkey is the Cyprus conflict. The Turkish invasion and occupation in 1974 of 36% of the territory of the Republic of Cyprus (where the Turkish Cypriots represented only 18% of the population, the rest being almost exclusively Greek-Cypriots) resulted in the displacement of 200,000 Greek Cypriots from the North to the South (subsequently replaced by 100,000 settlers from Turkey). A just settlement of the Cyprus issue, based on a bi-zonal and bi-communal federation, as agreed in the 1977 and 1979 summits between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders could pave the way for expanded cooperation between Greece and Turkey.

In April 2004 a plan for the reunification of Cyprus drafted by the U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan failed to meet the expectations of the Greek Cypriots, as the plan –though trying to be reasonably balanced– did not set a definite timetable for the withdrawal of Turkish troops and substantial numbers of settlers, while also extending the right of intervention of the three guarantor powers, the UK, Greece and Turkey; these rights deemed contrary to international law, were also perceived as incompatible with membership of the EU. Nevertheless, the two communities in Cyprus are gradually moving closer to each other. Indeed, following the decision of the Turkish Cypriot administration to allow the free movement of persons, many Turkish Cypriots are now employed by Greek Cypriot companies. Greece has supported the Government of Cyprus on the

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issue of Turkish Cypriot exports to the EU, which should bear the seal of the Republic of Cyprus or an EU seal if an agreement was reached on the opening of the port of Famagusta.

The Cypriot government has demonstrated its willingness to facilitate the contacts and cooperation between the two communities, by demolishing the wall on the Green Line as a confidence-building measure.

Further to the possibilities offered to the T/C by the E.U. Financial Regulation and the Green Line regulation, there are also bilateral measures recently announced by the Cypriot government to boost the economy in the occupied part of Cyprus, as well to improve the well being of the T/C.

EU involvement in Greek-Turkish disputes

Belonging to the European Community was perceived as a valuable security asset when Greece submitted its application for membership in 1975. Greece has since benefited from its participation in EC / EU policy-making but has had trouble convincing its partners to contribute to the settlement of Greek-Turkish disputes.

The aforementioned involvement actually started with a dispute that is not Greek-Turkish as such, the Cyprus conflict. EU partners displayed solidarity on this issue, insofar as it was related to International Law, by refusing to recognise the secession and independence of the self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in 1983 and by developing the relationship with the internationally recognised

Republic and preparing the ground for its accession to the EU in May 2004, together with the nine other European countries which signed their accession agreements in Athens, on 16 April 2003.

Greek foreign policy came, however, many times at odds with EU policy on Turkey. Greece's opposition to the Customs Union Agreement and related financial assistance to Turkey was lifted on 6 March 1995, only after Greece secured a promise by the Council that accession negotiations with Cyprus would start six months after the end of the Intergovernmental Conference scheduled to prepare the EU for enlargement.

The European partners of Greece, most of which are members of NATO, have been reluctant to support Greece in cases of direct confrontation between this country and Turkey. Nevertheless, in the dispute over the Imia islets, the Council of Ministers called on Turkey to refer its claim to the International Court of Justice. Thereafter, the Luxemburg summit of the European Council in December 1997 refused to include Turkey among the countries eligible for EU membership on the grounds that this country did not meet the political requirements, including acceptance of the compulsory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice. Interestingly, Greece made known to Turkey that, notwithstanding the fact that this country had not accepted the compulsory jurisdiction of the Court, it would itself accept its jurisdiction in any proceedings instituted by Turkey.

Turkish accession to the EU

Greece was long perceived by

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Turkey as a country conspiring to achieve its permanent exclusion from Europe. Nevertheless, after the rebuff of Turkey by the European Popular Party (Christian Democrats) in 1997, the then Foreign Minister Theodore Pangalos acknowledged publicly that Turkey is part of Europe from a historical viewpoint, and since the Helsinki E.U. Summit in 1999, all Greek governments have actively supported Turkey's European perspective. In Greece's view, Turkey is entitled to a fair treatment, i.e. equivalent to that of the other candidate countries. Respect of international law and human rights by candidate countries remains, nevertheless, a high priority for Greece.

As a result of the fundamental re-assessment of Greek-Turkish relations following the earthquakes that hit the two countries in 1999, Greece lifted its objections to EU financial assistance to Turkey, part of which was redirected to serve the reconstruction efforts in the area affected by the earthquakes. Moreover, at the Helsinki Summit of the European Council in December 1999, Greece agreed on the inclusion of Turkey among the candidates for EU membership; the final statement of the summit also included a provision calling upon Turkey to submit border disputes with its neighbours to the International Court of Justice.

The New Democracy government which came into power in March 2004 has supported unambiguously the Turkish bid for EU membership and the opening of accession negotiations, which was finally made possible in October 2005. Strong personal ties were es-

tablished between Prime Ministers Karamanlis and Erdogan, leading to a de-escalation of Greek-Turkish conflicts to issue conflicts rather than existential threats. Turkish accession to the EU, a not too distant prospect if Turkey continues its adjustment process, will entail, among other things, a common citizenship and a common currency between the two neighbours. This would give a new boost to the economic relations which have flourished in the context of the Customs Union and would open a new era of partnerships in business, civil society etc.

Conclusion

In Greece's view, security and stability in the Mediterranean, Balkan and Black Sea areas are interrelated. The self-restraint of governments in the pursuit of national interests, although an important factor, cannot by itself achieve the said goals. Long-term security and stability depend on the economic development of the aforementioned areas, as well as on cultural interchange between the peoples involved. Greece believes that a just settlement of the Palestinian conflict, along the lines of U.N. resolutions will give a new impetus to Euro-Arab relations, while also ensuring the long-term security of Israel. Moreover, the anchoring of the European periphery to the Euro-atlantic institutions remains a top priority of Greek foreign policy.

USEFUL LINKS

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
www.ypex.gov.gr